

Chapter 1

Introduction

The 1991 *General Plan* was written for a county that was largely undeveloped. The document's planning strategy was sound, but it quickly became apparent that the policies to implement it were no match for market dynamics. The speed with which the County is building out and the services required to serve it have been considerably greater than originally anticipated. Plan amendments to the Dulles South and the Toll Road area plans in 1997 and 1998 respectively were attempts at strengthening the County's growth policies. Despite these efforts, the dramatic changes in circumstance persist and the need for a comprehensive approach was warranted. These changes are documented throughout the Revised Plan; however, they can be summarized as follows:

- Demographics: population (e.g., 97 percent increase from 1990 to 2000), school-aged population, house-hold and employment growth and geographic dispersal of this growth
- Demand for and cost of County services: growth in the County budget, Capital Improvements Program (CIP) and debt burden, increased tax rates, increased service levels and expectations
- Capacity of County infrastructure (changes to prescribed standards and limits):
 - Water quantity and groundwater and surface water and quality issues
 - Wastewater systems: legislation affecting approval of individual, on-site system
 - Transportation: uncertainty of timing and funding of needed improvement
- Air Quality: Federal rulings that strengthen timing and enforcement of Clean Air Act standards, (the Region's difficulty in meeting air quality requirements) which jeopardize federal funding for highway projects
- State and local government relationships: lack of state support for growth management tools, restrictive legislative initiatives (e.g., vesting)
- National economy: impacts of a boom economy followed by signals of a weakening economy on land values and personal property

The citizens of Loudoun County have strongly expressed their support for smart growth and a new direction in development planning with greater emphasis on slowing growth rates and enhancing the quality of life. The *Revised General Plan* has been a community effort. This public process has clarified the direction that the County should take over the next twenty years, and the Revised Plan will be the County's framework for consistent decision-making during the period. If respected and followed, the Plan will help balance the many needs and desires of the community, while protecting the resources that make Loudoun an enjoyable place to live, to work and to visit. This document charts a path that is well reasoned and feasible. It also gives the citizens of Loudoun County an active role in planning and provides strong reason to believe that change can lead to a desirable future.

Purpose and Definition

The *Revised General Plan* is the foundation of the County's Comprehensive Plan and an official public document adopted by the Loudoun County Board of Supervisors. The basic purpose of a Comprehensive Plan is established in the Code of Virginia, Volume 3A, paragraph 15.2-2223, which states: "The Comprehensive Plan shall be made with the purpose of guiding and accomplishing a coordinated, adjusted, and harmonious development of the territory which will, in accordance with present and probable future needs and resources, best promote the health, safety, morals, order, convenience, prosperity, and general welfare of the inhabitants."

Policies in this document provide guidance for development decisions. These policies can be amended without straying from the basic goals of the plan, as new information becomes available or to address further changes in circumstances. The *Revised General Plan* is not intended to be a static document. In fact, the Commonwealth of Virginia requires that comprehensive plans be reviewed at least every five years.

The *Revised General Plan* provides the basis for evaluating land-development proposals. The Plan is the foundation for amendments to the Zoning and Subdivision ordinances to ensure that the County's goals are implemented through the regulatory process. Following the adoption of the Revised Plan, these ordinances and the *Facilities Standards Manual* will be updated so that they comply with the revised Plan policies.

Legal Basis for the Plan

The County Planning Commission is responsible for preparing and recommending to the Board of Supervisors elements of the County's Comprehensive Plan. The Code of Virginia, Section 15.2-2223, states: "The local commission shall prepare and recommend a comprehensive plan for the physical development of the territory within its jurisdiction."

Within statutory limitations afforded by the Dillon Rule¹, the County can manage development in accordance with the land use policies of its Comprehensive Plan. Virginia Code Title 15.2 contains the primary enabling legislation for counties, cities, and towns, and this enabling legislation is broad. The Virginia Supreme Court generally gives credence to local land use decisions that are reasonably and uniformly applied.

State case law envisions strong links between a comprehensive plan, zoning and subdivision regulations and the capital improvements program that establishes the location, financing and timing of local public facilities (Section 15.2-2239 et. Seq. Va. Code Ann.). This integrated planning approach is expected to provide a growth-management strategy that will sustain local jurisdictions as they grow. Loudoun's local government has been, and continues to be, a leader in integrating land use planning and fiscal management.

The County, in fact, was an early participant in land use management. The Board of Supervisors adopted its first zoning ordinance in 1942 and its first comprehensive plan in 1959. Over time, as the County's population has grown, the Board has enacted increasingly specific regulations governing land use and density. Its most recent efforts to better manage growth were in 1997, when allowable densities were reduced in the area governed by the *Dulles South Area Management Plan*, and in 1998, when reduced density and development phasing were introduced in the Toll Road planning area. The Board also has doubled the level of capital contributions requested of developers applying for rezoning, though due to base density exclusions and percentage contribution levels in the County's proffer system, the public continues to pay the majority of capital costs to serve new projects.

¹ Under the Dillon Rule, the Board can only regulate land use as permitted by the General Assembly expressly or by necessary implication from statute. Board of Supervisors v. Horne, 216 Va. 113, 215 S.E.2d 453 (1975).

Relationship to Other County Planning Documents

The County's Comprehensive Plan consists of several related documents, including the *Revised General Plan* and amendments thereto, specific area plans, strategic plans, and the *Revised Countywide Transportation Plan* (Revised CTP). The transportation plan, which superseded previous transportation policies embedded in earlier County documents, was adopted in 1995 and has undergone concurrent revision during the Comprehensive Plan Review and update.

The 1991 *General Plan* replaced the County's 1979 *Resource Management Plan* (RMP) and the 1984 *Rural Land Management Plan* (RLMP) as the "umbrella" document for the County's planning efforts. The 2000-2001 Comprehensive Plan revision process reinforced and refined countywide goals and policies not only for the *General Plan*, but also for subsequent area plans. Area plans supplement the *Revised General Plan* with customized planning policies for particular areas or communities. The existing area plans are: *Eastern Loudoun Area Management Plan* (ELAMP, 1980); *Leesburg Area Management Plan* (LAMP, 1982); *Dulles North Area Management Plan* (DNAMP, 1985); *Waterford Area Management Plan* (WAMP, 1988); *Cub Run Area Management Plan* (CRAMP, 1989); *Round Hill Area Management Plan* (RHAMP, 1990); *Dulles South Area Management Plan* (DSAMP, 1993); *Toll Road Plan* (TRP, 1995); *Purcellville Urban Growth Area Management Plan* (PUGAMP, 1995) and the *Comprehensive Plan for the Town of Hamilton and Urban Growth Area*, 1995. The County's strategic plans contain policies affecting specific land use categories. The three strategic plans include the *Countywide Retail Policy Amendment* (1997), the *Strategic Land Use Plan for Telecommunication Facilities* (1996) and the *Greenways and Trails Policies* (1994).

Many of the policies included in these area and strategic plans coincide with the *Revised General Plan* policies. However, as with any update or revision of a major planning document, conflicts may arise between previously adopted policies and new policies. The policies and guidelines in the *Revised General Plan* will supersede any conflicting policies and/or guidelines contained in any of the plans mentioned above with the exception of the PUGAMP. The PUGAMP is unique because the Town and County jointly adopted it. The jointly adopted PUGAMP establishes detailed land use and growth management policies for the area surrounding the Town. As such, any policies or amendments of the Revised Plan that conflict with the PUGAMP must be reviewed and approved by both the Town and the County. At a future date, some of the area plans will be replaced by community plans or area plans for new subareas established within the major policy areas defined in this Plan.

Comprehensive Plan Review and Update Process

The Revised Comprehensive Plan process was conducted during 2000 and 2001 and is the product of citizens, the Planning Commission, the Board of Supervisors, County staff and consultants. The *General Plan* and the *County-wide Transportation Plan* were reviewed concurrently by the Planning Commission over two months. The Commission identified concerns in addition to those initially raised by the Board of Supervisors and also received public input in several forums. The County staff produced a Framework Report for the comprehensive plan review categorizing the issues that had been identified through the public process. At the end of March 2000, the Planning Commission endorsed the scope of the Plan revision and provided guidance for the preparation of "issue papers" on the eleven categories identified in the Framework Report.

The priority areas identified for policy revision were Smart Growth, Environmental Resources and Policy Implementation, Historic/Archaeological Preservation, Rural Residential, Rural Economy, Community Identification, Transition Areas, Town Urban Growth Areas, Fiscal Impact, Major Transportation Policies, and Economic Development. The papers framed the policy choices for addressing the issues, and the Planning Commission set the desired direction through the review process.

A. Public Participation Process

The *Revised General Plan* was prepared with extensive citizen involvement. Every effort was made to ensure that those people interested in participating in the comprehensive plan review and update process had the opportunity to do so. Community support of the revised Plan is vital to its implementation, and the County values the active participation of local residents.

The public process involved many residents, including those not typically involved in land use issues. This was accomplished through an ambitious community-involvement strategy that provided ready access both to new information and to the process.

The Department of Planning, located in the County Government Center in Leesburg, maintained a public notebook that served as the official file for documents produced during the process. Materials also were available in the six public libraries, where they were kept in note-books for easy use. In addition, documents were posted on the Planning Department's website.

All sessions of the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors were open to the public and recorded on audiotapes. The Planning Commission's three initial public-input sessions were well-attended "town meetings" that provided a broad spectrum of citizen opinions. The meetings in 2000 were held at the County Government Center on February 16; at the Sterling Community Center on March 9; and at Loudoun Valley High School on March 11. The Planning Commission held three planning forums in June and July that each had more than 150 participants who discussed the issues in a more interactive format. The forums were on June 27 at Harper Park Middle School in Leesburg, on June 29 at Sugarland Run Elementary; and on July 13 at Round Hill Elementary. Focus groups on environmental implementation and community design and identity also were held during the process. A public input forum, prior to the preparation of the Planning Commission's November 14, 2000 draft was held on August 2 in Leesburg.

The Planning Commission also received presentations from the Loudoun County Sanitation Authority (LCSA), the Office of Housing, the Economic Development Commission (EDC), the Fiscal Impact Technical Review Committee, the Health Department, the Rural Economic Development Task Force, and the County Assessor. Ten stakeholder sessions were held with representatives of more than twenty groups and citizen committees involved in land development, transportation, business, tourism, environmental or historical resource protection, and local government. Represented were the Northern Virginia Building Industry Association and the Dulles Board of Realtors, the Loudoun County Chamber of Commerce, the Loudoun Tourism Council, National Association of Industrial and Office Parks, the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority, the Piedmont Environmental Council, the Sustainable Loudoun Network, the Country Life Center, the Purchase of Development Rights Committee, the Open Space Advisory Committee, the Library Board, the School Board, and the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board.

Input sessions and meetings were held with officials of each of the County's seven incorporated towns, primarily to address the continued usefulness of Joint Land Management Areas (JLMAs) as a land use management tool. Neighboring jurisdictions receiving notifications and updates were the Virginia counties of Clarke, Fairfax, Fauquier, and Prince William, the Town of Herndon; Frederick and Montgomery counties in Maryland; and Jefferson County, West Virginia.

B. Public Review and Adoption

The Planning Commission conducted over 17 hours of public hearings on the November 14th draft of the *Revised General Plan* and *Revised Countywide Transportation Plan* on December 12th and 16th, 2000. With consideration of the public's input and additional review of background data and information, the Planning Commission met weekly from January through April 2001 to hone and refine the Plan policies. A final Planning Commission draft of the *Revised General Plan* and *Revised Countywide Transportation Plan*,

incorporating changes from these deliberations, was prepared and approved by the Planning Commission on May 1, 2001. A resolution certifying this Planning Commission approved draft was sent forward to the Board of Supervisors on May 1, 2001.

Upon receipt of the Planning Commission's recommendations, the Board of Supervisors spent several weeks reviewing the Plan in Committee of the Whole briefing sessions. The Board then conducted public hearing sessions on the Planning Commission's draft Plan on June 12th, 14th and 16th, 2001. Following the public hearing, additional work sessions were held by the Board, which concluded with adoption on July 23, 2001.

Revised General Plan Format

The *Revised General Plan* is organized into eleven chapters. Following the Introduction, Chapter Two sets forth the Planning Approach, including Housing and Infrastructure Policies. Chapter Three contains policies related to the County's fiscal management and provision of public facilities. Chapter Four is devoted entirely to a discussion of and policies for Economic Development. Chapter Five establishes the environmental, natural and heritage resources context for the Green Infrastructure.

Chapters Six, Seven, Eight, Nine and Ten contain the policies for the Plan's distinct geographic policy areas, which include the Suburban Policy Area, the Rural Policy Area, the Transition Policy Area, the Towns and JLMAs, and Existing Villages.

The final chapter of the Plan contains recommendations about how it will be implemented including proffer guidelines and design guidelines. A summary of the next planning steps that are intended to frame the Board's future land use work program discussions is also included.